

*Caring for Idaho's Infants and Toddlers*  
**Learning to Calm Myself**

*“We should educate while we care and care while we educate.” ~ Magda Gerber*

Infants and toddlers grow, develop, and learn in different ways and at their own pace. Each child is unique because of their biology and environment, as well as their personality.

Newborns reach two important milestones in their first few months. One is the ability to establish a somewhat regular routine, and the other is to begin to find ways to calm or soothe themselves. These milestones are critical because they support further development.

According to T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., a newborn has six sleep-wake patterns (shown below). Caregivers can identify these patterns to help support the baby’s natural routine and ability to calm themselves.



Caregivers can support the baby’s development by responding to their natural routine and their needs. For example, when a newborn is in the quiet alert state, like the child in the picture above, this is the best time to play and talk with him. After 30 to 40 minutes, most infants will move into the active alert state, where their bodies will become more active. They may kick one leg over and over or move their arm up and down. These moves are the baby’s way of regulating their heartbeat, breathing, and attention. During this time, the caregiver can watch for signs that the baby needs a break. If the baby turns away or their body movements become rigid, they probably need a break.

<b>Infant Sleep-Wake States</b>	<b>Quiet Sleep</b>	Eyes closed and face relaxed
	<b>Active Sleep</b>	Eyes closed but flutter, makes funny faces
	<b>Quiet Alert</b>	Ready to play, eyes open and watching
	<b>Active Alert</b>	Movements are frequent and in rhythm
	<b>Crying State</b>	Uncomfortable or hungry
	<b>Drowsiness</b>	Waking up or falling asleep

Adapted from T. B. Brazelton’s Sleep-Wake States

## Stage 1 and 2 (Birth to around 6 months)

### I learn to calm myself when I:

- am comforted by a caregiver.
- become aware of my body.
- can begin to control parts of my body, like bringing my thumb or fingers to my mouth.
- begin to become aware of my routines.

### My caregivers help me learn to calm myself by:

- snuggling, cuddling, and physically nurturing me in ways that I like.
- checking the noise, temperature, light, and other environmental factors that may be upsetting me.
- reducing stimulation when I'm fussy or withdrawn. For instance, instead of rocking, snuggling, and singing, try rocking only.
- calmly responding to my signals, cries, and body language.
- using a soothing voice to talk with me when I'm sad, frustrated, or angry.

## Stage 3 (6 to around 12 months)

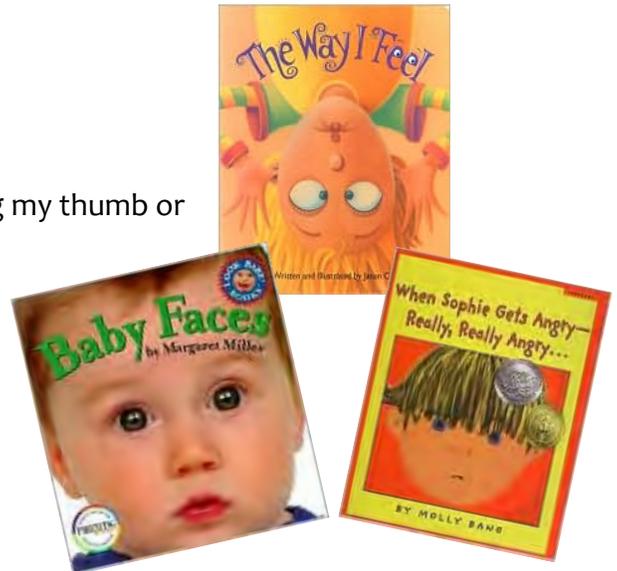
### I learn to calm myself when I:

- stroke or hold my blanket, or bring my hands or pacifier to my mouth.
- communicate to my caregivers that I need help (like reaching for them when I am tired).
- use sounds and gestures to indicate my needs. I may cry when I'm hungry, or reach for a comfort item when I am upset.

## Stage 4 (12 to around 24 months)

### I learn to calm myself when I:

- begin to follow simple directions.
- begin to have a set routine and understand what comes next.
- seek my caregiver for support.
- better recognize and express my feelings.
- start to play near other children and show interest in them.
- use gestures to get my needs met, like shaking my head and/or using words.



### Books for Children about Feelings

[The Way I Feel](#)

By Janan Cain

ISBN: 1884734723

[When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really, Angry...](#)

By Molly Bang

ISBN: 0439598451

[Baby Faces](#)

By Margaret Miller

ISBN: 0689819110

## **Stage 5 (24 to around 36 months)**

### ***I learn to calm myself when I:***

- can follow simple directions.
- have a set routine and know what comes next.
- can use simple words to tell you what I want.
- beginning to be able to tell you how I feel.
- have choices and can help with routines.
- am given a warning when a change is about to happen.



### ***My caregivers help me learn to calm myself by:***

- nurturing me in ways that I like.
- giving me lots of hugs, snuggle time, play time, and individual attention.
- setting simple rules. Be sure to respond consistently to my behavior.
- responding promptly when I show that I need attention.
- appropriately modeling emotions and impulses.
- setting routines based on what I need. Make changes to the routine if needed.
- encouraging use of a transitional item or “lovey.”
- staying with me during upsetting situations.
- talking with me and helping me with my feelings. For example, say “You were sad when we had to come inside, would you like me to hold you?”
- reading me books about emotions.
- offering me age-appropriate choices.
- planning outside play in natural spaces. This can be relaxing, calming, and fun.

*To learn more about social emotional development in infants and toddlers, see “My Social and Emotional Health,” and the Resources and References at the end of these materials.*